

KICKSHAWS

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Kickshaws is currently being assembled by a series of guest editors. All contributions should be sent to the editor in Morristown, New Jersey.

Impossible Humor

The effectiveness of the punchline of a joke often depends upon a sudden and unexpected combination of images from two normally separated domains. The joke is funny only if the hearer or reader is familiar with both worlds. If the domains of understanding are sufficiently small and the cognoscenti of the domains well-isolated from one another, there may possibly exist no audience for whom a particular joke is funny. We must further require that if it is necessary to explain a joke, it loses its humor. We might, for example, envision a joke about techniques of coconut-harvesting written in the language of Greenland Eskimos, and assume a null potential audience.

I submit the need for an understanding of both logology and genetics for appreciation of the following:

A GNOME is the result of the deletion in a GENOME.

Hilarious, I'm sure, to seven people in the world, none of whom can be identified. I suggest a competition for a joke least likely to have a comprehending audience - but entrants must submit actual jokes, not ideas or formulas for jokes. If, however, it is argued that the proof of a joke's humor requires a laugher, there will, by definition, be no one to judge the competition.

Special Categories

Listed under the entry SADDLE in Webster's Second New International Dictionary are three numbered general definitions, and their elaborations, followed by fourteen specialty headings: Architecture, Cookery, Dentistry, Harness, Logging, Machinery, Mining, Nautical, Ordnance, Paleontology, Physical Geography & Meteorology, Poultry, Shoemaking, and Zoology. Each of these indicates a very particular use of the word SADDLE, restricted to each special field.

The following quiz is based on these special category headings in Webster's Second. Below are ten sets of categories, each corresponding to a common four-letter word. In each case, all the Webster's Second special categories for that word are listed, mixing together those for different parts of speech for the same word. For example, if the word STRING were used, all special categories,

whether for the noun form or the verb form, would be combined in the one list. Later in this Kickshaws, an extra clue for these words will appear.

Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

1. Anatomy, Astrology, Bookbinding, Card Playing, Dentistry, Fortification, Horticulture, Ice Hockey, Math & Crystallography, Mechanics, Military, Ordnance, Printing, Steam Engine
2. Civil Engineering, Commerce, Dentistry, Machinery, Nautical, Pharmacy, Poker
3. Cricket, Finance, Games & Sports, Rowing
4. Astrology, Card Playing, Costume, Cricket, Horticulture, Mechanics, Music, Nautical, Wrestling
5. Botany, Chemistry, Gymnastics, Horticulture, Law, Lead Mining, Mechanics, Nautical, Paper Manufacture, Phonetics, Physical Chemistry, Zoology
6. Billiards & Pool, Commerce, Glass Manufacture, Nautical, Law
7. Agricultural Machinery, Brickmaking, Cards, Carpentry, Electricity, Harness, Logging, Music, Railroads, Weaving
8. Architecture, Chess, Electricity, Glass Manufacture, Gunnery, Military, Mining, Roman Antiquities
9. Brewing, Machinery, Sports, Theater
10. Anatomy, Phonetics, Surgery, pl. Veterinary

Xerampelinus Rediscovered

A wonderful word, as appealing in appearance as is its definition, "the dull red or purple of dead vine leaves." So says D. Drayton Jackson, in A Glossary of Botanic Terms (London, Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd, 4th Edition, 1928; 481 pages). This book is stuffed with woody wonders, many unheard-of by the Webster's or the Oxford English dictionaries.

There's a glorious mess of consecutive vowels in B1A1OMETAMORPHOSIS, defined as "disadvantageous change." CASE10US, meaning light grey, is a short word with AEIOU in order (also found in Webster's Second). CREMNOPHILUS, or cliff-dwelling, contains the adjacent letter string MNOP. There are a set of three related words, each adding a letter, and thereby changing definition slightly: HELODAD, a marsh plant; HELODRAD, plant of a marsh thicket; HELODRYAD, marsh forest plant.

Some others need airing solely to juxtapose odd words with odd meanings: AUCUPARIOUS, attracting birds; ALLMON1A, ascending sap; CHORTONOMIA, the art of making an herbarium; TYLICOLOR, the color of a wood-louse; LENDIGER, having the appearance of small insects; and, best of all, ATOMATE, sprinkled with atoms.

Of final note are two more Agamemnon words - that is, words

with three adjacent sets of palindromic trigrams (**Word Ways**, May 1980): ERGOGENESIS and ZYGOGENESIS.

And One More, in Amber

And a third new Agamemnon word, part of the Latin binomial of an East Indian pine tree, PINUS AJANENSIS, is to be found on page 135 of The Book of Amber (London, Ernest Benn Ltd, 1932; 268 pages), by George C. Williamson. This is a fascinating, if overly compulsive, account of all there was to know about this lovely substance fifty-odd years ago.

So agonizingly thorough is the author, that he feels obliged, albeit in a footnote, to write at some length about a totally extraneous matter:

There is a town in India which bears the name of Amber. It is in ruins, and was the ancient capital of the Jaipur State in the Rajputna Agency. The name of Amber connected with this city is mentioned by Ptolemy. The city was flourishing in A.D. 967. In 1728, it was supplanted by the modern city of Jaipur, from which it is distant five miles. It is a very fine ruin, with magnificent sculptures in it, but its name has no connection in any way with the fossil resin with which we are concerned.

We must marvel at this man who, loving the substance amber and its story, felt driven to describe anything else with the same or similar name. Which explains his devoting six-and-one-half pages to a discussion of ambergris, having, as he readily admits, "... nothing whatever to do with true Amber...". Here must really have been one who could not put down a dictionary once he was foolhardy enough to open it. We sympathize.

Heady

"In New Zealand...the shorn locks of a chief were gathered with much care and placed in an adjoining cemetery. The Tahitians buried the cuttings of their hair at the temples." This marvelous double entendre is found in J.G. Frazer's The Golden Bough (Avalon Books, New York, Volume 1, 1981 edition) on page 200.

New England Cardinals, and Other Birds

Most towns are surrounded by other towns, but WOODSTOCK, Connecticut is special, in being surrounded by EAST WOODSTOCK, NORTH WOODSTOCK, SOUTH WOODSTOCK, and WEST WOODSTOCK. (A little farther out lies WOODSTOCK VALLEY.) The only other such cardinally trapped town I can discover is HARWICH, Massachusetts, with HARWICH PORT added as a flourish to the towns of EAST, NORTH, SOUTH and WEST HARWICH. Another species of quartet found, it seems, only in New England, is the group of towns in Connecticut named EASTFORD, NORTHFORD, SOUTHFORD and WESTFORD and the towns in Maine named EASTPORT, NORTHPORT, SOUTHPORT and WESTPORT. In both of these latter instances, the four towns are not geographically near one another.

It is true that if one considers the two towns in Illinois named CHICAGO and CHICAGO HEIGHTS, we might combine them to derive EAST CHICAGO HEIGHTS, NORTH CHICAGO, SOUTH CHICAGO HEIGHTS and WEST CHICAGO, but even if you point out there is, in addition, EAST CHICAGO in neighboring Indiana, it clearly does not match the purity and simplicity of the Harwich-Woodstock gambit.

I will grant, however, that since twelve of the forty American cities and towns which begin with the trigram WAU (a full 30 per cent) are to be found in the state of Wisconsin (Hammond's Ambassador World Atlas, 1954), there may be logological wonders in other parts of the country. All right, since you asked: WAUBEKA, WAUKAU, WAUKESHA, WAUMANDÉE, WAUNAKEE, WAUPACA, WAUPUN, WAUSAU, WAUSAKEE, WAUTOMA, WAUWATOSA, and WAUZEKA.

But that does not go far in explaining why all seven of the geographical subdivisions of Australia begin with letters in the second half of the alphabet: NEW SOUTH WALES, NORTHERN TERRITORY, QUEENSLAND, SOUTH AUSTRALIA, TASMANIA, VICTORIA, and WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

Oklahopeless!

Poor Jud is dead.
A candle lights his head.
He's lyin' there so peaceful anserine.
(He was a silly goose.)

"Knock-knock,"
"Who's there?"
"Theresa."
"Theresa who?"
"Theresa bright golden haze on the meadow."
(A slight knock-knock joke; others?)

From Impeccable Sources

RUN n. Def. 2g. Escape Obs. Macro Plays. (Webster's First)
WEBBER n. One who punches trunks. (Webster's Second)

Oregonyms

Place names throughout the history of the state of Oregon have been carefully collected and discussed in detail in Lewis A. McArthur's Oregon Geographic Names (Portland, Oregon Historical Society). I came upon a 4th edition (1974) on a recent trip, and I know there is an updated 5th edition. The preface tabulates the 4800 entries according to the language of origin of each name. In percentage, the results show: English 64.8, Indian 22.6, German 5.8, French 3.5, Spanish 0.7, Greek 0.6, Hawaiian 0.5, Latin 0.3, Portuguese 0.2, Hebrew 0.1, Made-up 0.2, Unknown 0.7. Very diverse indeed, and a few deserve logological comment.

There are a striking number of reversals, indicating that Oregonians favor this method of naming: ANIDEM, NAMORF, RAGIC, REDNE, RETLAW, ROLYAT and SENOF Lake, the last name among the very few English language words ending in J. Most were short-lived

Post Offices at the turn of the century, but at least SENOF Lake is still extant. There are many acronyms, some of which are rather odd: EDDELEO Lakes, and a few palindromes: KAWAK Butte, ADA, ANA River, BOB Creek, DAD Spring, TNT Creek, TOT Mountain. Does LAVA Lake count?

Some unusual doubled letters: FISHHAWK Creek, JACKKNIFE Canyon, MIKKALO, LLAO Rock, OOSCAN Butte, ARROWWOOD Point, POWWATKA Ridge, and some two-word triples are here as well: ODELL Lake, PRILL Lake, ROSS Slough, RUSSELL Lake, SWISS Spring.

Some odd consecutive letter strings appear in FRENCHGLEN, WAHCLELLA, T'VAULT Creek, WIYEAST Basin, YOUTLKUT Butte, and note is made of thirteen entries beginning with the KL bigram.

Misspellings are given legitimacy when they become place names. Most notable is ABBERDEEN, which is the first alphabetic entry (ZWAGG Island is the last). Also arising from mishearing, slang or misspelling are GUMJUWAC Saddle (from Gum Shoe Jack) and the KENTUCK Slough.

There are BAYOCEAN, CATCHED TWO Lake, MUDJEEKEEWIS Mountain, OUXY and ROPERS BUNION. Also, a NO NAME Creek, to add to the list of names which are self-denying (*Word Ways*, November 1982 (ickshaws)). The name WHOREHOUSE MEADOW has received some national notoriety; the Bureau of Land Management changed it in the 1960s to NAUGHTY GIRL MEADOW, and the debate continues. The macabre DEATHBALL Rock is named for "an attempt made by a surveying party cook to bake some biscuits." FRYREAR Butte, despite the image it provokes, is named for John B. Fryrear.

In a neat touch, HALO Creek is named for the Indian word for "none" - "O" is brought to mind, either way. The Indian names reflect the history of Indians and settlers, with BATTLE CREEKS in six different counties. The Chinook use of tautonyms leads to many tautonymic place names: HEHE Butte (Chinook for laughter!), KETCHKETCH Butte (rough), KOKOSTICK Butte (woodpecker), LOLO Pass (round), MOOSMOOS Creek (cattle), PILPIL (red), SISI Butte (blanket), TUMTUM River (heart), WAWA Creek (talk). Finally, a series of buttes are named with the words for Chinook numbers: IKT (one), MOKST (two), KLOAN (three), LOCKIT (four), KWINNUM (five) and TAGHUM (six), a nice addition of alien number-names to English.

Legalese

"Boston man surrenders to police - admits killing two elderly women. Next day at his arraignment, pleads innocent." Extracted from a news report, it all sounds so reasonable, but it's patent nonsense unless you are a lawyer.

Overlap Word Chains

This topic was introduced in the May 1987 *Word Ways* in the form of a chain of fifty USA town names, one from each state. Overlap chains can have two or more separate sequences and I suggest

we borrow from biology and speak of n-stranded chains. The city names chain is 2-stranded. Here is an example of a 3-stranded chain:

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I N D U S T R I A L I S T | S A R T O R I A N | O D E S
I N | D U S T | R I A | L I S T S | A R T | O R I A | N O D E S
I N D U S | T R I A L | I S | T S A R | T O R I | A N O D E S

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For such chains, note the following rules: 1. each word must have at least two letters, 2. a break in only one strand may occur at a particular locus in the chain, and 3. no word may be repeated.

Here is a 5-stranded example, all words in Webster's Second:

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S A L A M A T | E S
S A L | A M A T E S
S A | L A M A | T E S
S A L A | M A T E S
S A L A M | A T E S

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These chains are similar to the heteronyms of the National Puzzlers' League, except that in the case of the heteronym, each strand must make sufficient sense to be capable of incorporation into a verse.

If the chain can be closed upon itself, a circle is formed. An example of a 2-stranded word circle:

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R E T U R N | I N G O T | H E R A L D | E R I C A | R U S S O | r e
R E | T U R N I N G | O T H E R | A L D E R | I C A R U S | S O r e

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Finally, here are the definitions for a 4-stranded word chain with eighteen letters in each strand:

1. right of precedence; dull; domino; patriarchates
2. away; Che; St. Phillip _____; letters
3. sticker; bed; heavy blow; Bolivian Indians
4. hopple; id; style; Bibl. n. pl. (Webster's Second)

A Buggy Premonition

In the May 1982 **Word Ways**, I noted 'the logological properties of the Latin names of butterflies, as tabulated in H.L. Lewis's Butterflies of the World (Follett, 1973). The article highlighted EMESIS NEMESIS, the name of a little Texas butterfly, and I suggested it might refer also to a "nostrum to prevent vomiting." In October 1984 I found an ad in the New England Journal of Medicine for Compazine [registered trademark], a drug to treat nausea and vomiting; the ad was headed in bold type "The Emesis Nemesis Compazine." J.F. Cassin responded to a letter I wrote to Smith, Kline & French Laboratories by recalling they had considered a butterfly motif for their ads, possibly for the connection with butterflies in the stomach and nausea. It is clear that if they do, they will know which butterfly to use.

Misphonetics

It is perhaps ungenerous to point up errors in a secretary's transcription from dictation - and it is surely true that most of

he mistakes on the typed page are to be traced to the dictater. Still, some wonderful phonetic errors are to be found, reminding me of a college classmate who was utterly baffled by a paragraph in French we copied to dictation. The professor spoke of a great artist and his life, but Richard became increasingly agitated, as I noted sitting next to him. Seems he was writing ces ans (his years) instead of Cezanne.

From my transcribed office notes:

"The patient eats a good eel of fish."

"Sensory loss is the monster bull on careful testing with a pin."

Needless to say, I send out letters containing these gems without revision.

Quiz

Identify the list of items whose first entry is Boston Home Medical Inc and whose last entry is Wellesley Fix It Shop. I give no clue for this quiz, but point out that all ten of the four-letter words in the Special Categories Quiz, above, begin with the letter F.

Danicism

The Danish company Brugsen, a chain of cooperative stores, prints a calendar each year with lavish photographs and excellent detailed accompanying text. November 1986 featured Danish emigration to America and highlights the friendship of Jacob Riis and President Theodore Roosevelt. The President is referred to as "Roosevelt I", an understandable if quaint error for a writer from a titular monarchy.

As a further example of missing the point by a kilometer, I just received an ad from Dantec, a Danish company which makes clinical electrophysiology equipment. It boasts "If Bach were living today he might have composed Counterpoint's software instead of the Brandenburg Concertos." That, of course, is sadly true - an unintended but poignant commentary on Western civilization. But if the ad-writer had written "as well as" instead of "instead of", all would be well.

And from Danish is an example of a cross-language synonymic phonetic reversal: tax in English is skat in Danish.

Sizes of Verbs

Some are minimally small. K as a verb has not yet made the Webster dictionaries (it's in 12000 Words as a noun), but I have heard "He's k'ed the side!", at least in 1986, when Roger Clemens of the Red Sox often did just that (struck out all three batters). This K of baseball is a unique abbreviation, in that it is the last letter of the word abbreviated: struck (out). In his discussion of the letter K in The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka (New York; Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1984), Ernst Pawel calls K "an amputated consonant with phantom-limb pains." A collection

of inventive descriptions of other letters would be worthwhile, if of this calibre.

X is another of the one-letter verbs. The Webster dictionaries list only four other verbs beginning with X - what are they?

And what is the longest English verb? Are there any which are longer than the 18-letter DEINSTITUTIONALIZE?

Canetti on Words

In the years between 1942 and 1972, while Elias Canetti worked on his two major opuses, the novel Auto-da-Fe and the treatise Crowds and Power, he jotted thoughts and fragments of thoughts into a series of notebooks. Shortly before he was awarded the 1981 Nobel Prize in Literature, these were edited and published as The Human Province (New York; Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1978). This work is a remarkable kaleidoscope of aphorisms and very short essays, some of which deal with the writer's great ambivalence towards words.

I'll sign off with a sampling:

The various languages you ought to have: one for your mother, which you will subsequently never speak again; one which you only read but never dare to write; one in which you pray but without understanding a single word; one in which you do arithmetic and to which all money matters belong; one in which you write (but no letters); one in which you travel, and in this one you can also write your letters.

If people had even the faintest and most non-committal idea of the life and living that go on in them, they would shrink back from many words and phrases as from poison.

Every language has its own silence.

Of all words in all languages I know, the greatest concentration is in the English word I.

There are no powerful words left. People sometimes say "God" merely to speak a word that used to be powerful.

To exist one needs a store of unquestioned names.

When speaking, he composes his words too calmly, he always has control of his words, they never chase him, they never jeer at him, they never make a fool of him - how can I trust this man?

A sentence by itself is clean. The very next one takes something from it.

Soon no ancient writing will remain undeciphered, and no new writing will turn up to be deciphered. Writing will thus lose its holiness.

The gods, nourished by worship, starving to death in unnamedness, recalled in poets, and only then are they eternal.

We believe a telegram. Nothing is more disconcerting than to learn that a telegram lied.

The best person ought not to have a name.

The letters of one's name have a dreadful magic as though the world were composed of them. Is a world without names conceivable?

Literature as a profession is destructive; one should fear words more.

All the places that words have been to! In what mouths! On what tongues! Who can, who may know them all, after these wanderings through hell, after these dreadful abysses.

The only interesting thing about translating is what is lost.

When you've made a lot of words, you lose your sense of how much they mean to others. Thus begins the actual wickedness of the word-man.

In a fog, shapes are like words. Anyone coming along in a fog excites me like a new word.

I have never been to any place whose name did not attract me there.

All events fear their words.

Every word should recall the fact that it was once palpable: the roundness of words: they lay in the hand.

He went mute out of distrust against adjectives.

One never suddenly gets rid of a word that has become dangerous. One first has to go to a great deal of bother to use it in the wrong sense.

The rich in words grow obsolete first. First the adjectives wither, then the verbs.

Great words ought to suddenly begin whistling, like a tea-kettle in which water is being heated: as a warning.

Words sucked full, like bedbugs.

A language in which a certain consonant is said to be lethal. Whoever pronounces it, drops dead. Whoever hears it, goes deaf.

Certain words, one feels, are too terrible for everyone but oneself.

The smashers of language are looking for a new justice among words. It does not exist. Words are unequal and unjust.

There are sentences that mean something only in another language. They wait for their translator as for a midwife.

One would have to say it in as few sentences as Lao-tse or Heraclites; and so long as one cannot do that, one really has nothing to say.